

Stress and immunity

New research suggests that feeling insecure in close relationships with others may take a toll on the immune system.

In a study of 61 healthy women, Italian researchers found that those who had difficulty establishing close, trusting relationships showed signs of weaker immune function. Specifically, lab experiments showed that the women's "natural killer" immune system cells were less able to protect against invaders, compared with those from other study participants.

Natural Killer cells play a role in the body's normal defenses against bacteria, viruses, fungus and even cancer.

The results of this study are in line with extensive research that shows that stress can interfere with normal immune function.

A person's support system of friends and family is an important bulwark against the effects of stress. Certainly personality traits interfere with establishing lasting, supportive relationships.

In related research, the Italian scientists found associations between insecure personalities and certain skin diseases related to immune dysfunction. These include psoriasis, and alopecia areata, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss.